



BioShock

Are you a man, or a slave?

POPULAR SYMBOLISM

BioShock

Are you a man, or a slave?

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Disclaimer: You may choose not to read this if you have yet to finish the game and you don't want its story spoiled to you.

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1 Introduction

Is state atheism doomed to degenerate into despotism as BioShock's Rapture would suggest? Or is the very idea of state atheism a misnomer, and are we simply trading God for men playing God?

2 Andrew Ryan

“What is the difference between a man and a parasite? A man builds, a parasite asks ‘Where’s my share?’ A man creates, a parasite says ‘What will the neighbors think?’ A man invents, a parasite says ‘Watch out, or you might tread on the toes of God...’” - **Andrew Ryan**

Who is this Andrew Ryan, you might ask, and who are these pesky ‘parasites’ he’s referring to? His background is never properly revealed in the main storyline, but piecing together the different audio diaries (a narrative device used in the game) gives us a rough idea of what drove Andrew Ryan to build the epicenter of his work, the self-sufficient underwater city Rapture, on the bottom of the ocean.

Turns out that Ryan is in actuality a political refugee from Soviet Russia, a man by the name of ‘Andrei’. Andrei was none too happy about the Bolshevik Revolution in the 1920s. He viewed men like Vladimir Lenin as ‘parasites’ – men wrapping themselves in an altruistic cloak as a simple means to pillage a country of all its worth until there was nothing left.

This brought him to the America of the late ‘20s¹². As luck would have it, this got him kneedeep into the Great Depression era. To one’s surprise, he was able to sustain a healthy business under his new pseudonym, ‘Andrew Ryan’, and in fact quite enjoyed his stay in the USA. However, it wasn’t too long before he too would reject his new home. Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal meant increased federal encroachment on the private and public sector, as well as providing a safety net for the very ‘parasites’ he had despised – those who lacked the sheer willpower to excel, to exceed expectations. The final straw for Ryan was in 1945 when the US dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was such a disgusting example of science being perverted by government that Ryan could no longer stomach being an US citizen.

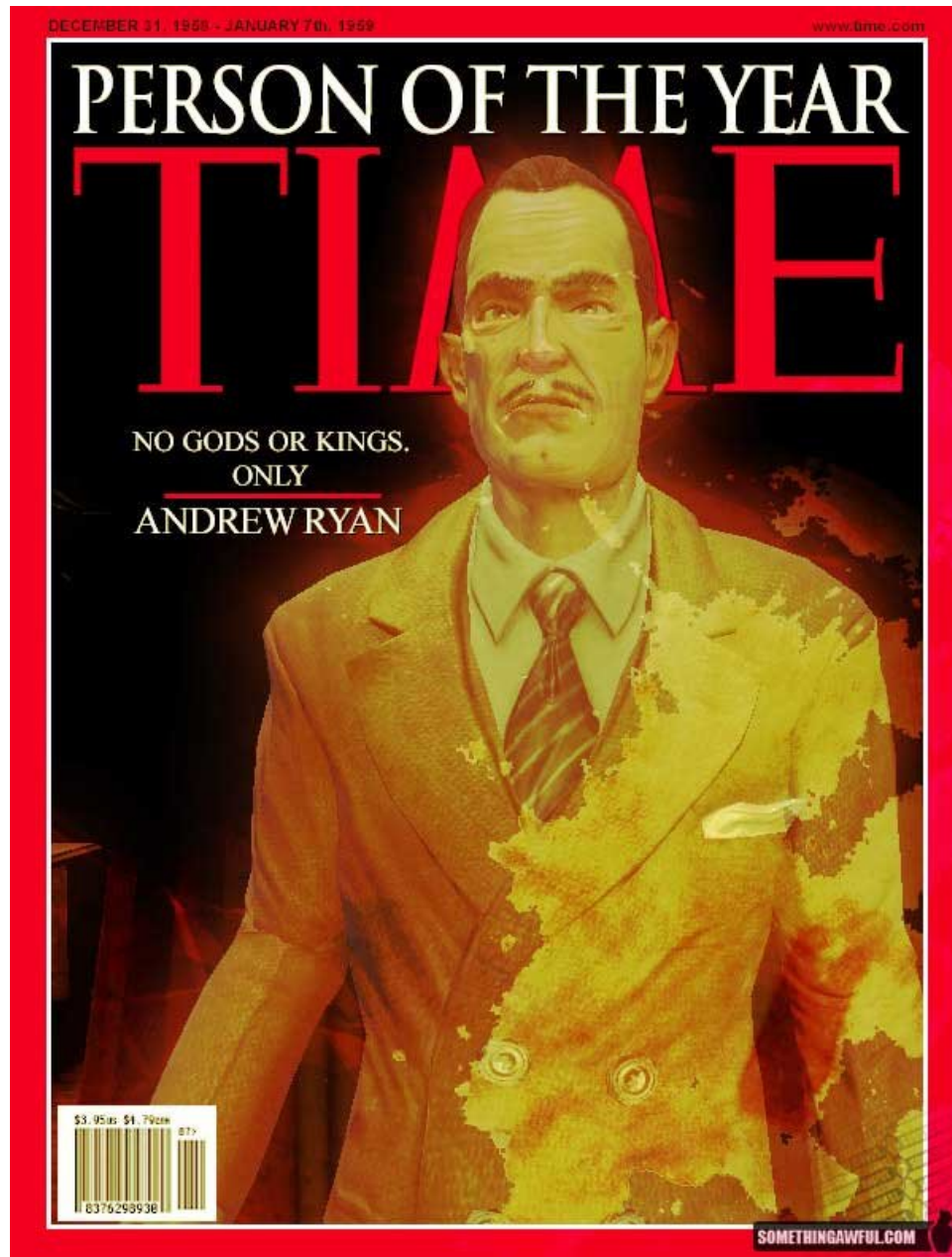


Fig. 1: Is Andrew Ryan being sincere about his intention to keep Rapture free of religion? He certainly seems to have a blind spot for Greek mythology - naming the power production facility of his self-sufficient utopia after Hephaestus, among other things.

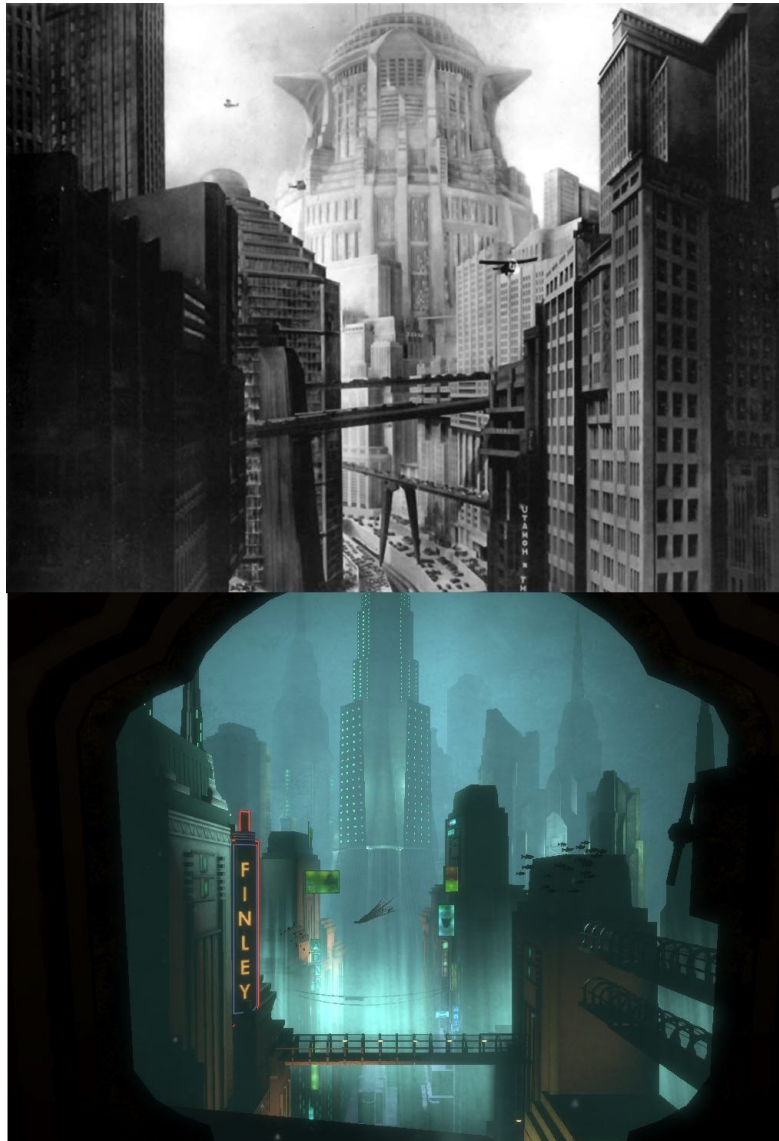


Fig. 2: Rapture seems to take its stylistic cues from Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece, *Metropolis*. What the game and the film both seem to have in common, is that they have a lot to say about the dangers presented by transhumanism.

2.1 Rapture

It was in 1946, shortly after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that Andrew Ryan came up with the idea of building an utopian society deep undersea (no doubt inspired by Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea[1]) – where Washington and Moscow's tentacles could not reach³. This self-sufficient city would have its own power facility, be totally independent of the three major political power blocks (US, USSR, Vatican) and be free of religious tenets, superstition, parasitic behavior and 'petty morality'.

Rapture is a libertarian's wet dream: a society based on laissez-faire capitalism, a small government, no nation building, and – this would be music to Ayn Rand's ears – wholly abhorrent towards religious beliefs. It's basically Atlas Shrugged's The Gulch meets Jules Verne's 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea[1].

And for the first two decades, Rapture was quite the resounding success. During the early 1950s, Rapture's population peaked at several thousands. The best and the brightest from all over the world flock to Rapture to bask in this Objectivist utopia.

However, whether it be due to the greed of men or inherent flaws in the foundation of the state itself, utopias have the nasty habit of turning into dystopias overnight. In Rapture's case, genetic engineering – in the form of ADAM and EVE – turns out to be its undoing, resulting in a total breakdown of society and Rapture's self-styled Ayn Rand turning into his own Orwellian nightmare. (conveniently, this is where the backstory ends and the game begins)

So where did it all go wrong?

2.1.1 Contraband market

As a society, Rapture only functions as long as it is shut off from outside influence that could lead to a rise in 'parasitical behavior' (in the words of Ryan). Realizing this, Andrew Ryan imposes the penalty of death on anyone running contraband. Andrew Ryan hopes this hardline measure stops the influx of banned material goods into Rapture – but as they say, forbidden fruit often

¹ Leaving aside the ideology for a moment, there are several striking similarities between Ayn Rand and the fictional Andrew Ryan. For one, both originated from Russia and both ended up immigrating to the US in the wake of the Communist Revolution. Even Andrew Ryan's name is a reference to the founder of Objectivism – ANDrew rYAN, anyone?

² G Edward Griffin, outspoken critic of the Federal Reserve System, and author of the bestselling book, *The Creature From Jekyll Island*, has written a critique of *Zeitgeist: Addendum*[4].

³ The current economic crash has produced its own Andrew Ryan in futurist Jacques Fresco. His proposal: build a self-sustained city (currently codenamed 'The Venus Project') where money plays no central role – a resource-based economy instead of a monetary economy. The 2008 documentary *Zeitgeist: Addendum* heavily advocates this concept as a solution to the current economic crisis, caused by fractional-reserve banking.

Critics have accused the Venus Project of being heavily based on Karl Marx's doctrine – specifically, in an interview with *Zeitgeist: Addendum*'s creator, 'Peter Joseph', it is argued that such a society cannot hope to succeed without a central state/government imposing its will on the people – which runs counter to Fresco's claim that "The 'state' does nothing because there is no 'state'"[1, 3].



Fig. 3: Those who would scoff at the surreal nature of a lighthouse in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean might not be aware that the artists pulled this concept from Jules Verne's 'Lighthouse at the End of the World'. It's there to reinforce the 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea image of BioShock's Rapture.

becomes all the more tempting. A black market emerges in Neptune's Bounty, with several hoodlums getting rich in the process. Chief of these 'hoodlums' is Frank Fontaine, an enigmatic, enterprising business tycoon (see Frank Fontaine). To appear legitimate, he starts his own front company [Fontaine Fisheries] to whitewash his smuggling ring's operations. He would later take on an alternate persona to rally the poor disillusioned working-class against the rich. (see Fontaine's ruse and Civil War)

3 Frank Fontaine

"These sad saps. They come to Rapture, thinking they're gonna be captains of industry. But they all forget that somebody's gotta scrub the toilets. What an angle they gave me- I hand these mugs a cot and a bowl of soup, and they give me their lives. Who needs an army when I got Fontaine's Home for the Poor?" - **Frank Fontaine**

Frank Fontaine starts out as a hoodlum from the Bronx that manages to carve a niche for himself in Neptune's Bounty, smuggling blacklisted goods from the surface. Smuggling is a capital offense in Rapture and automatically puts you on Ryan's shitlist, and for a while it appears as if Fontaine is treading on thin ice.

But that's before his fishermen discover, almost by accident, a sea slug of the rarest kind. To the fisherman's surprise who caught it, he is able to use his severed hand again for the first time in years after being bitten by the thing (to the point where he can play a game of catch). This catches the interest of 'Kraut scientist', Bridgette Tenenbaum. She approaches the best labs in Rapture for research funding opportunities, but they all turn her down. Fontaine sees a business opportunity here where others see none – when he express interest in funding Tenenbaum's research, Tenenbaum, put off by his thuggishness, reluctantly accepts the offer, knowing full well that Fontaine has the resources to make it all possible. In her studies, she learns that the sea slug contains rare stem cells that allow for genetic changes to one's body (in other words, a mutagen). For a scientist living in a society where religion is outlawed, it's interesting that she decides to coin it 'ADAM'. Perhaps she has a sense of humour.

Either way, Fontaine is now in business. His applied sciences company, Fontaine Futuristics, turns these stem cells into easily marketable products, called 'plasmids', that lend the user varying abilities. Suchong, another scientist that is in charge of rolling out the plasmids, carries out varying experiments on people – some effective, others... not so. But hey, according to Ryan, if 'petty morality' is your thing, then you've got the wrong place.

Ironically, at this point Frank Fontaine embodies the very essence of Andrew Ryan's Objectivist philosophy. Here is a street-smart fellow that propels himself to the top through sheer business acumen and out-of-the-box thinking. That he breaks Ryan's protocols entirely in doing so says more about the folly of Ryan's founding statutes than it does about Fontaine's questionable ethics.



Fig. 4: Casting himself as the working man's hero, Fontaine sets up poor houses all over Rapture. It's here where they get all spliced up - creating a formidable army for Fontaine to pit against Ryan.

Because of this, Ryan is at first reluctant to meddle in Fontaine's affairs. Regulation of the plasmid business would run opposite to Rapture's free-market ideology that Ryan has been championing for so long. When he gets complaints about Fontaine's near-monopoly in genetic engineering, he simply suggests that they 'find a way to offer a better product' and let the market do its thing.

3.1 Fontaine's ruse

Fontaine, aware that there are several chinks in his armour, realizes that in order to usurp Ryan, he needs to maintain a squeaky-clean public image and con the people into leading a revolt against Ryan. Fontaine, having a reputation for being a smuggler and a crook, could never do this, but 'Atlas', a hero of the people, could.

His plan works brilliantly. By feigning death and adopting the pseudonym of 'Atlas', Fontaine builds the image of a caring folk hero, who manages to exploit public disapproval of Ryan's policies and uses it to his own advantage.

One of those masterstrokes of propaganda on Atlas' part is the Little Sister's Orphanage. Under the banner of 'tending to the poor, sick children of the working class', Fontaine manages to institutionalize little girls between the age of 7 and 10 that are then turned into the Frankenstein-like Little Sisters (see Tenenbaum – Mozart of genetics).



Fig. 5: 'Who is Atlas?' asks the ad. A thoughtful question indeed, and no doubt a reference to the line 'Who is John Galt?' from BioShock's main source of inspiration, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

Diane McClintock, a former mistress of Ryan, epitomizes the term 'useful idiot' (coined by Soviet Union founder Vladimir Lenin). She is duped into believing that Atlas is a modern-day liberator that has the best interests of the working-class people at heart. In reality, this nice-guy image is merely a facade for a political power-grab: whether under Ryan Industries or Fontaine Industries' rule, things are not likely to get better any time soon.

4 Eugenics/Transhumanism

BioShock is a cautionary tale of unchecked utopian ideals and genetic engineering run amok. Rather than empowering the disabled (such as giving the visually impaired the ability of sight⁴) and leading to a more 'just society' as transhumanists would argue, in BioShock it serves as the catalyst for a bloody civil war where both sides are in an arms race to produce the toughest splicers ('splicer' is

⁴ Bionic eyesight for blind people is already a reality. According to The Times, two blind patients at the Moorfields Eye Hospital in London have undergone the operation successfully[5, 6, 7].

a term used in the game to refer to someone who has been genetically altered). As Bill McDonagh, one of Ryan's contractors points out in one of his audio diaries:

“There's an arms race on here in Rapture, but it's not about who can build the best guns and the biggest bombs. It's about who can become less of a man and more of a monster. . .” - **Bill McDonagh**

Transhumanists would argue that these concerns are unwarranted and smack of 'luddism' – that there was similar paranoia in the '90s concerning the Internet, and look how that turned out⁵.

4.1 Class warfare

Andrew Ryan's utopian society begins to disintegrate as soon as an upper class elite starts positioning themselves as a new kind of aristocracy. This causes great discontent among the poor, who argue that the wealth should be more evenly spread and that this was exactly the reason they rejected capitalism and communism.

Further compounding the situation is ADAM. The rich, growing ever more decadent, start turning to 'plasmids' and becoming addicted to them in the process. Several enterprising individuals start capitalizing on it, one of them being Dr. Steinman (see Steinman – Picasso of surgery).

4.1.1 War is a racket

In his book *War Is A Rocket*, former US Marine Major General Smedley Butler went into extensive detail on the symbiotic relationship between war and business. Similarly, Rapture, ever the free-market society, abhors an economic vacuum. Shops start popping up like mushrooms offering artillery and plasmids – ensuring the bodies don't stop piling up on the streets any time soon.

Like major wars are fought over oil today, in Rapture that scarce commodity is ADAM. There's plenty of demand and not enough supply for both sides in the war. Ryan has the upper-hand in this fight, though, having nationalized Fontaine Industries when Fontaine, sensing defeat, faked his own death and went underground as 'Atlas' with a Plan B.

4.1.2 Angels and Mr Bubbles

Ryan and Suchong repurpose the Little Sisters from mere ADAM factories into scavengers, traversing the streets and harvesting ADAM with their syringes

⁵ In his review[8] of *The Matrix Reloaded*, Ray Kurzweil is critical of the perceived 'Dystopian, luddite perspective' and makes the assumption that its negative portrayal of virtual reality will turn out to be just as misguided as initial fears surrounding the Internet:

“Early fiction, such as the novels *1984* and *Brave New World*, portrayed the worldwide communications network as essentially evil, a means for totalitarian control of humankind. Now that we actually have a worldwide communications network, we can see that the reality has turned out rather different.”[8]



Fig. 6: The horrors of war: World War I veterans were often horribly disfigured, and unable to re-integrate into society due to their grotesque appearance*. To all intents and purposes, war gave birth to cosmetic surgery. BioShock's Splicers were based on several WWI case studies.

from the corpses of killed people. Because the Civil War has turned Rapture into a dog-eat-dog society and the average Splicer is not above molesting and killing a little girl, Suchong decides to give the Little Sisters a father figure in the Big Daddy.

The Big Daddy is a lumbering giant with a drill for a weapon. Nearly indestructible and loyal towards defending the Little Sisters, they are the result of a person's skin and organs being grafted into an enormous scuba diving suit.

It is revealed that the Little Sisters are initially repulsed by the corpses they have to raid for ADAM. Suchong ponders a solution in one of his audio diaries:

“Here is Suchong’s problem. Little Ones are repulsed by the look and smell of corpses. Must find a way to make gathering task more... attractive, maybe if we program them to see bodies as something more appealing: kitty cats, chocolate bars, some other stupid thing these children enjoy.” - **Suchong**

Suchong decides to mentally condition the children to associate the bodies of dead splicers as “angels” – a process more appealing for the girls and feeding into their psychological makeup. He also trains them, very much like Pavlov’s dogs, to pair with the Big Daddies through various means, one being a pheromone that the girls are particularly attracted to.

Because Ryan has no access to the orphanage center from where to get his guinea pigs, he lowers himself to kidnapping children at random.

4.2 Sacrificing free will

As the war worsens, Ryan begins sacrificing every principle he stood for. First to go out of the window is his economic doctrine – while previously fiercely opposed to ‘big government’ (he once burned down his national park in America in protest of the government nationalizing it), he decides to nationalize Fontaine Industries when given the chance. He does promise to break it up later, but this promise rings hollow, even to the ears of his chief of police, Sullivan.

Though never revealed to the public, that he goes so low as to kidnap children off the street doesn’t speak too kindly about his moral fibre, either. At least the little girls in Fontaine’s Orphanage Center were given the free will to flock to the orphanage houses, even though they were misled as to their real intent.

While insisting on not regulating the plasmid business (going on and on about how everyone is bound to the Great Chain, while he has no problems with giving it a tug when it comes to other issues, such as child kidnapping), Ryan decides to regulate nearly everything else.

- Hacking one of the vending machines is enough for Ryan to declare you a ‘parasite’, and well, a ‘parasite’ gets a little visit of a security bot drone – with a machine gun.
- The plasmids are modified into making the user open to mental suggestion through pheromones, effectively making the state (ie. Ryan) capable of



Fig. 7: The conditioning process the Little Sisters undergo is typical of Behavioral psychology/Pavlovian Conditioning.

controlling all citizens of Rapture. This is how Ryan is able to assemble his own army of splicers to lead the fight against Atlas.

- He forces people to pay a tax on oxygen at one point.
- Public gatherings of more than 4 people now require a 'permit'.
- Smuggling is a capital offense, and will get you hanged.
- Interfering with a Little Sister can get you killed.
- The bathyspheres, used for travelling, are now to be used only by Ryan and his inner circle. To accomplish this, some kind of genetic identification check is fitted on the things – but due to a glitch, everyone in the same genetic ballpark can get on the bathyspheres as well.

Ryan's transformation from libertarian idealist to iron-fisted dictator had the side effect of making him extremely unpopular. Several attempts were made on Ryan's life by his closest confidantes. None of them turned out to be successful, however, and to commemorate the assassination attempts, Ryan would take a leaf out of Vlad Tepes III's book.



Fig. 8: One of the 'Little Sisters' harvesting ADAM from an 'angel', while her surrogate 'daddy' keeps guard.

5 The decadent elite

5.1 Tenenbaum - Mozart of genetics

"I was at German prison camp only of sixteen years old when I realize I have love for science. German doctor, he make experiment. Sometime, he make scientific error. I tell him of this error, and this make him angry. But then he asks, 'how can a child know such a thing?' I tell him, 'Sometimes, I just know.' He screams at me, 'Then why tell me?'"Well,' I said, 'if you're going to do such things, at least you should do them properly.'" - **Bridgette Tenenbaum**

Tenenbaum plays the part of the ubiquitous Prometheus/Frankenstein archetype. Notorious for being a Holocaust survivor that willingly participated in the eugenic experimentations of the Nazis and at the end came to see them as 'kindred spirits' (as Fontaine puts it in one of his audio diaries: "She's damaged goods all right"), she spearheads the ADAM business and is forced to ally herself with Fontaine because 'the respectable labs all turned me away'.

Because demand for ADAM is high and supply not nearly enough, she implants the particular sea slug used for extracting ADAM into the stomach of little girls, becoming a Little Sister in the process. Due to regurgitation, they yield up to 30 times the amount of ADAM the sea slug alone would make. While Tenenbaum had hoped to keep them in a vegetative state, they were unable to produce ADAM without being fully functional. Over time, it begins to bother her that they exhibit the same characteristics of regular children: joyful, recreative, loving, yet the sea slug inside their bellies gives them a craving for feeding

on the dead.

Similarly, she tries to ease her conscience by equating the termination of a Little Sister to mercy killing because of the Sister's dependence on the slug. Once you harvest the slug, the host [meaning the girl] dies. Tenenbaum rationalizes this to herself by arguing that they are already practically dead anyway. 'So you see it's not like killing,' Tenenbaum said. 'It's more like removing a terminal patient from life support.'⁶

Eventually, her conscience eventually gets the better of her:

"I feel... hatred, like I never felt before, in my chest. Bitter, burning, fury. I can barely breathe. And suddenly, I know, it is not this child I hate." - **Bridgette Tenenbaum**

It's at this point that she starts looking into ways to 'harvest' the slug inside the girls without killing them in the process, in effect turning them back into normal girls. She eventually develops a plasmid to do just that. But before long, Fontaine is out of the picture, and with Ryan taking hold of Fontaine Industries, Tenenbaum goes into exile.

5.2 Steinman - Picasso of surgery

Upon discovering stem cells in sea slugs (later rebranded 'ADAM' by Rapture's scientific community), a new consumer market is built overnight in plasmids (in a nutshell, add-ons to your genetic makeup which lend the owner varying empowering abilities). Dr. Steinman is a cosmetic surgeon living in a state where, to quote Ryan, 'the artist would not fear the censor, the scientist would not be bound by petty morality. the great not be constrained by the small', and personifies the worst fears people have about genetic engineering. An out-of-control nutjob being inspired by the sudden discovery of ADAM as a means of genetic improvement, the unbridled liberty being given to the private sector in Rapture causes Dr. Steinman to become deranged, and starts viewing himself as a 'Picasso of surgery':

"When Picasso became bored of painting people, he started representing them as cubes and other abstract forms. The world called him a genius!⁷ I've spent my entire surgical career creating the same

⁶ The Groningen protocol, legalizing the euthanising of infant children, has been widely criticized for setting the precedent for further drastic eugenics policies (though Eduard Verhagen, the pediatrician pushing for this type of legislation, finds this criticism to be ridiculous and uninformed[10]). In particular, critics find the criteria used in the protocol to be all-together vague and non-specific – which could lead to the legislature being used for varying cases based on one's interpretation of it.

Now Dutch parliament is considering voting on a bill that, if passed, would enable the state to force contraception for mothers it deems "unfit for parenting" – which sounds awfully similar to 'unfit to breed'[10, 11, 12].

⁷ It's ironic that Steinman remarks that the world viewed Picasso as a genius. There's great controversy over an interview Italian journalist Giovanni Papini (supposedly) had with Picasso. Allegedly, Picasso looked upon his own work with disdain. Later, it was revealed that this interview was a work of fantasy, and a certain theory that has been promulgated over

tired shapes, over and over again: the upturned nose, the cleft chin, the ample bosom. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could do with a knife what that old Spaniard did with a brush?" - **Dr. Steinman**

In a sensible society, Dr. Steinman would not have been allowed to further this dangerous train of thought, let alone bring it to market. But because that would go against Andrew Ryan's libertarian ideals, he is encouraged to further his business in the public eye (all throughout Rapture, you can see advertisements for 'Dr.Steinman's Cosmetic Enhancement'). Later in the game, we see the extent of Steinman's madness: due to his excessive addiction to ADAM, he starts talking to a hallucinatory Aphrodite (the Greek goddess of beauty) and berating the (perceived) ugliness of his guinea pigs:

"What can I do with this one, Aphrodite? She WON'T. STAY. STILL! I want to make them beautiful, but they always turn out wrong! That one...too fat! This one...too tall! This one...too symmetrical! And now - What's this, goddess? An intruder! He's ugly! Ugly ugly UGLY!" - **Dr. Steinman**

5.3 Cohen - Dali of psychopaths

As if not already covering enough ground, BioShock's plot also takes us to Fort Frolic, the place where the elite go to fulfil their hedonistic needs.

As in the US, political bias is also prevalent in Rapture's world of entertainment, and with the Civil War in full swing, a war of 'words' and 'lyrics' is being fought between Anna Culpepper and Sander Cohen. Culpepper (a fierce critic of Ryan's increasingly oppressive and authoritarian policies to combat Atlas and his army of splicers) accuses Cohen of being a 'songbird for Ryan', his works basically toeing the party line. Cohen, not appreciative of criticism, sends Andrew Ryan's chief commissar, Sullivan, after her. When he [Sullivan] is eventually ordered to put a hit on her, he deeply comes to regret his decision, and begins to distance himself from Ryan.

With her out of the way, and with Rapture slowly crumbling before his eyes, Cohen starts retreating from the unpleasant reality of the situation and blames his inability to draw crowds on his peers in Fort Frolic. Like a modern-day Marie Antoinette, he lives in his own bubble, probably not even aware that the public by large stays at home because there's a bloody civil war going on claiming citizens left and right⁸.

the years is that NATO pressured Papini to put out this faux interview to downplay Picasso's pro-Communist leanings.

Critics of modern art have since focused on other statements made by Picasso to reinforce their beliefs that modern art is inherently inferior to classical art[13, 14].

⁸ As far as character studies go, this is the best one[3] I've found yet on Sander Cohen. The writer, herself being a stage artist, sees in Cohen one of many creative types that are consumed with self-doubt, and instead try to earn validation from others through art. With no one to play to as society collapses in Rapture, Cohen begins to turn on himself and his ability to 'teach', starting with killing off his protégés or putting hits on them.[3, 2]

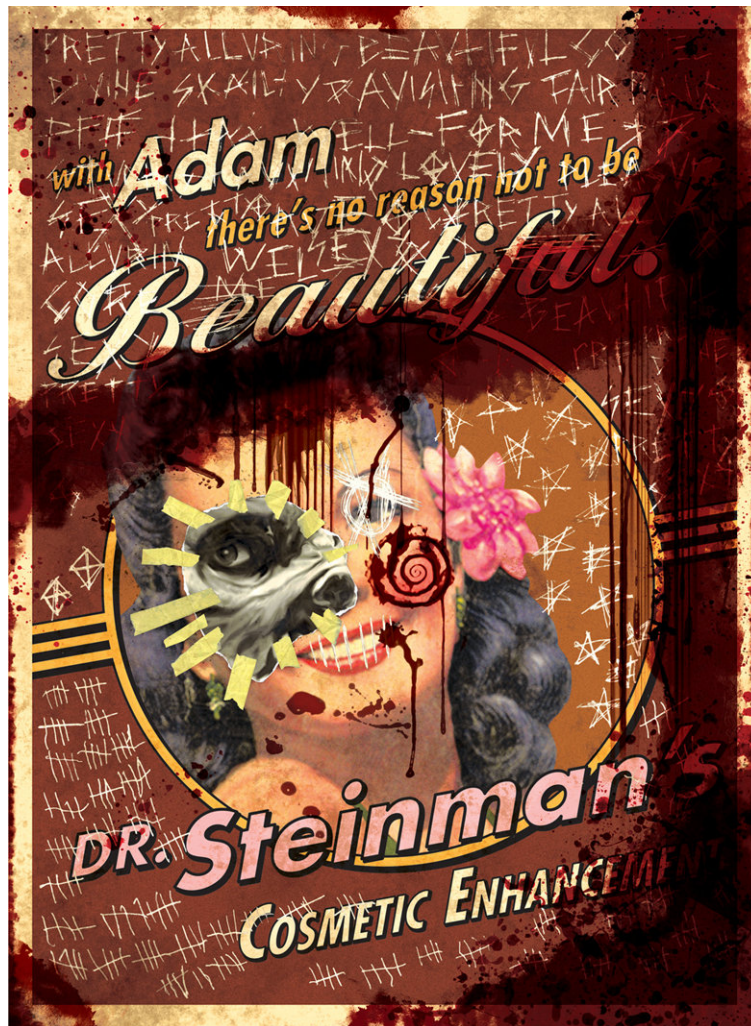


Fig. 9: Steinman on the issue of cosmetic surgery: "With genetic modifications, beauty is no longer a goal, or even a virtue. It is a moral obligation. Do we force the healthy to live with the contagious? Do we mix the criminal with the law-abiding? Then why are the plain allowed to mingle with the fair?" His definition of what constitutes beauty would seem to be limited only by his overt imagination.



Fig. 10: Sander Cohen's 'masterpiece'/'requiem' is finished, and in a surreal moment he appears out of nowhere walking down the stairs amongst a host of confetti and spotlights.

When the player arrives in Fort Frolic by bathysphere, Cohen asks the player to kill and photograph his peers to complete his 'masterpiece'. This 'masterpiece' doubles as a 'requiem', as is later revealed in one of his audio diaries. There are subtle hints that Sander Cohen is/was a homosexual and had unrequited feelings towards Andrew Ryan.

5.3.1 The Iceman Cometh

It's a bit surprising nobody else has seemed to pick upon this influence. The ice sculptures in Fort Frolic and the reference to 'The Iceman Cometh' allude to Dutch artist Folkert de Jong's art exhibition by the same name. Sander Cohen's last name is a homage to the 'James Cohan Gallery' – where Folkert's 'Iceman Cometh' was exhibited[18, 19, 20].

6 Mind control

Mind control plays a big part in BioShock. The protagonist, Jack, is an illegitimate son of Andrew Ryan who has been conditioned (through a combination of hypnosis and Classical/Pavlovian Conditioning) into following orders by Frank Fontaine.



Fig. 11: The 'Iceman Cometh' art exhibition by Folkert de Jong; (Bottom) One of Sander Cohen's ice sculptures in Fort Frolic. One of Cohen's victims even namechecks the 'Iceman Cometh'.

6.1 Would you kindly

‘Would you kindly’ is the trigger phrase that Atlas (Fontaine in disguise) uses to get Jack to follow objectives. He uses the phrase carefully so as not to give Jack and the player any reason to be suspicious. As far as the player is concerned, Atlas is merely a familiar videogame plot device – the man on the other end of the phone providing you with advice and mission briefings.

Videogame players have been so acclimatised to carry out mission objectives in dozens of other games that most of the time, they are not even aware that what they’re doing in the game is not based on free will but rather the illusion of it, with the designer/director pulling the strings in the background – very much like the wizard in *The Wizard Of Oz*. *BioShock* uses this disconnect to lull the player into a false sense of familiarity, then pulls the rug from under your feet as an added psychological plot twist.

6.2 MKULTRA

The game seems to contain several allusions to the mind control experimentations conducted by the CIA that continued up until the late ’60s under the codename MKULTRA⁹.

For one, the trigger phrase ‘Would you kindly’ is derived from the opening sentence of James McCrae in a ‘Motions of Condolence’ session in the Canadian parliament¹⁰. During the session, it was revealed that late member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, David Orlikow, made it a point in the later stages of his life to expose the brainwashing experiments conducted on his wife and some 40 patients in Canada [by the CIA].

6.3 A man or a slave?

When you eventually encounter Andrew Ryan, he has become aware of who you are and rather than die in vain, he tries to live up to his ideology by accepting the Sanction of the Victim – a concept from Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* where the good accept that they have to suffer for the sake of promoting their core principles. Andrew Ryan asks the player a crucial question: “Are you a man, or a slave?”, only to humiliate Jack first by using Atlas’ trigger phrase to issue pet commands. Figuring Jack has suffered enough embarrassment by now, he gives Jack the choice to break his mental conditioning by handing him his golf

⁹ In response to a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requesting all available documents pertaining to MKULTRA, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has released the requested documents on three CD-ROMs. A lot of information has been blacked out, but there is still a lot of illuminating (and shocking) information contained within.

There is a free website that provides all the files that came off the three CIA MKULTRA CD-ROMs[4].

¹⁰ Read the transcript here. Below is the quote in question:

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Would you kindly call the condolence motions beginning with Mr. Hamilton?[21]



Fig. 12: It has recently been unveiled that CIA mind control experiments were the real source of inspiration behind Anthony Burgess' novel, *A Clockwork Orange***. BioShock is a similar expose of MKULTRA - with the only difference being that to the best of my knowledge, none of the BioShock staff were a victim of/participant in Ewen Cameron's experiments.

club and ordering to kill him [Ryan] – giving him the freedom of choice to obey his command or reject it. He taunts him repeatedly to ‘choose’ like a man, or ‘obey’ like a slave.

When this is over with and Atlas eventually gets what he wants (control of Rapture), Fontaine drops the charade and doublecrosses Jack. Of all people, the Little Sisters come to his aid and lead him to the Point of Prometheus, the place where Tenenbaum, the modern Frankenstein/Prometheus, and her ghoul-like children reside.

Tenenbaum, recognizing the evil she has unleashed in the name of ‘science’, decides to help Jack by removing (some of) his mental conditioning. With Ryan dead and Fontaine Industries now running the show, she figures Jack is the Little Sisters’ last hope of escaping this forsaken place.

7 Meaning behind words/names/terms

Name/word	Meaning	Object
Angel	The Little Sisters have been mentally conditioned by Suchong into seeing corpses as heavenly angels. In an audio diary, Suchong laments that some of the Sisters are repulsed by the corpses they have to harvest for ADAM, and so he tries to make the chore more appealing to a child.	Term
Big Daddy	A play on ‘Big Brother’, a term familiarized by George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty Four.	Character
Diane McClintock	Reference to Martha McClintock, notable for discovering the existence of human pheromones.	Character
EVE	EVE is basically the MP meter - without it, you can’t use your plasmids. EVE is represented as hypodermic needles that you need to inject into your arm. An obvious reference to Eve from the Bible.	Object
Kraut	A term used by the GIs for the ‘Germans’. It comes from sauerkraut, ‘sour cabbage’, often eaten by Germans. Has since become an ethnic slur.	Term
Little Sister	A play on ‘Big brother’, a term familiarized by George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty Four.	Character
Mr. Bubbles	A friendly nickname for the Big Daddies – uttered repeatedly by the Little Sisters.	Name

Parasite	A term borrowed from Ayn Rand's books - anyone with collectivist leanings that doesn't believe in a free market, expects a hand-out, wants to redistribute the wealth, hides behind the cloak of altruism, etc. Andrew Ryan uses it as an 'all-encompassing term' to describe anyone who doesn't agree with him or threatens to oppose his rule at the end.	Term
Splicer	Someone who has 'spliced'/integrated ADAM into his/her genetic makeup.	Concept
'The iceman cometh'	'And the iceman cometh, Sander baby. The iceman fucking cometh' is a reference to 'The Iceman Cometh', a popular play on Broadway in 1946 by the same name.	Dialogue

8 Footnotes

*. Nearly all the Splicers in the game have been based on case studies from Project Facade[22], a website dedicated to the facial injuries of World War I veterans and the reconstructive efforts of surgeon Sir Harold Gillies. Note that some of the images on the site are very graphic and can be horrifying.

**. According to the article[23], the author (Anthony Burgess) actively participated in the brainwashing / mind control experiments, and had to write a book about it in fictionalized form to get it off his chest[23].

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Fig. 13: For someone who proclaims to swear by no God but Man, it sure does seem hypocritical for Andrew Ryan, the founder of Rapture, to name the main power production facility of his self-sustaining underwater city after the Greek god of technology. Not only that, but his private office is also located in the same complex, hinting that Ryan has come to see himself, like Hephaestus, as the god of technology.

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BioShock

Are you a man, or a slave?